

Subject	Bonnie Watson Coleman Working Group: Criminal Justice Issues	Date	September 24, 2008
Submitted	Margaret Atkins, Drew University	Updated	Wednesday October 01, 2008 at 8:42 PM

Notes from 9/24 Working Group Meeting

In Attendance:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Cuqui Rivera, Programs Director	Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey (HDANJ)
Rosanne Scotti	Drug Policy Alliance
Meagan Johnson	
Tony Towns	
John Monahan	
Michael Jackson	
Joseph Youngblood	
Alexandra Fisher	
Margaret Atkins Coordinator of the Prison Education Program	Drew University
Gale Campanella Williams, President & Founder	Women Who Never give-Up (WWNG)
Lia Warner-Wilson, Community Outreach Director	Women Who Never give-Up (WWNG)
Rick Greenberg, Director of Strategic Communications	NJ Institute of Social Justice (NJISJ)

Background/Intro's:

Dr. Youngblood welcomed the working group on behalf of the Watson Institute and offered the importance of combining policy and practice. After introductions of everyone around the table, Rick and Margaret emphasized and recognized the work that has already been done in this field of criminal justice/prison policy reform. It was noted that this opportunity is simply a new vehicle through which to channel that work. The vehicle is intriguing as it has legislative power and interest behind it. Margaret provided some background information re: Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman's initiative and the idea for the regional public hearings. The Majority Leader is interested in having 8 regional public hearings across the State concerning the criminal justice system/prisons and hosted by houses of worship/churches in the community. The intention is to elevate the discussion, educate the public, and organize a strong community-based constituency around CJ/prison reform legislation.

The Working Group's task will be to continue to shape the topics of the public hearings, to help with the attendance/turn-outs at the hearings, and to do follow-up organizing post the hearings to demonstrate ongoing support for the policy recommendations that will come out of the hearing process. The working group will be collaboratively responsible for identifying, prioritizing, and crafting legislation that will be considered in this legislative process.

Discussion:

The majority of the meeting was spent in a brainstorming session with lively discussions around the specifics of the hearings, the "long-term" policy goals, and the "short-term" hearing topics. We acknowledged the necessity of linking the hearing topics to actual policy recommendations or current pending legislation and then attempted to work backwards from legislation to hearings. The discussion was framed around the empowerment and concerns of families with loved ones in prison (especially children), formerly incarcerated people, currently incarcerated people (jails and state facilities), and NJ clergy.

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Specifics of Hearings:

We sited the following 8-9 regions as host areas:

- Newark
- Camden
- Trenton
- AC
- Jersey City
- Somerset/New Brunswick
- Cumberland/Salem
- Passaic
- Monmouth

We discussed the structure of the hearings to include:

- Voices from the inside (letters)
- Experts (experiential and research)
- Celebrities/politicos (esp. budget committee members)
- Clergy leaders (in addition to hosts, reach out to catholic bishops and interfaith leaders)
- Local municipal government leaders
- The community (our networks and other orgs—reaching out to victims as well)
- People from the system (parole, DOC, judges, etc)

We further discussed logistical issues to address:

- The need to provide transportation to the hearing sites
- The need to possibly include other locations aside from churches
- The need to hold at least one hearing in a state correctional facility
- The need to put together a “glossary of terms” for those who will be moderating or involved in the hearings in order to help with the language being used

“Long-Term” Policies/Legislation:

- Article 23A (NY)—anti-discrimination laws re: employment of formerly incarcerated persons
- Formerly incarcerated persons = protected class citizen
- Job programming—development and training—linking housing issue and industry to employment (civic justice core-NY)—real licensing and certification available
- Removing surcharge from phone service and commissary; suspending child support obligations
- Drivers license/ID restoration upon release
- External oversight re: prisons through a community board; transparency laws
- Felony drug ban
- Expungement reform
- Elimination of incarceration for non-violent drug offenses
- Change military model of prison management (Integrative Justice Theory?)
- Create different system for mentally-ill offenders
- Mental Health legislation: “banning the shoe”; setting standards; releasing people w/access to their medication; providing general assistance

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“Short-Term” Hearing Topics under broad categories of Sentencing, Incarceration, and Reintegration:

- Employment
- Families of the Incarcerated
- Mental Health Care
- Inside Prisons (cultural competence; treatment; elderly/disabled; KKK; fines; gangs)
- Women
- Sentencing
- Cost of Business
- Deinstitutionalization—building community alternatives
- Drug Laws
- Classification—time management
- Parole and those who “max-out”
- Education/ special ed.-- linked to recidivism
- County jails vs. state facilities

At this point, the meeting had exceeded the time we had designated and so we concluded. Margaret agreed to type up the notes and circulate them to the entire Working Group (those present and absent). After feedback and any other additions or recommendations, Margaret will put together a proposal of hearing topics/policy recommendations for the Working Group. Upon approval, we will submit our proposal to the Majority Leader.

****We discovered our next meeting date was set for Yom Kippur and also conflicted with the Black Issues Convention. We proposed 10/1, 10/6, or 10/14 as an alternative. Upon further discussion w/ the Watson Institute, 10/14 seems to be the best date.

Please note it in your calendars:

Tues, **Oct. 14th** at 11am —101 W. State St.

The following meeting will be at NJISJ on Mon., **Oct. 20th** at 11am.

Notes Prepared and Submitted by:

Margaret Atkins, Drew University

Coordinator of the Drew Theological School Prison Education Program Theological School